

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1308

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MARR, UK, GW, IT, NATO

SUBJECT: EUROPEAN MULTI-ROLE COMBAT AIRCRAFT (MRCA)

REFS: A) LONDON 7328; B) NATO 2780; C) BONN 8111

1. EMBASSY WELCOMES LONDON'S THOUGHTFUL OBSERVATIONS ON U.S. POLICY TOWARD THE MRCA. WE CONCUR THAT THE SUCCESS OF THIS PROGRAM WOULD BE AN IMPORTANT MEASURE OF THE ABILITY AND WILL OF EUROPEAN ALLIES COOPERATIVELY TO DEVELOP AN ADVANCED WEAPONS SYSTEM. OF COURSE, "EUROPEAN" PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE MRCA (NEVER VERY BROAD) HAS DIMINISHED TO THE THREE MEMBERS OF THE CONSORTIUM, BUT BECAUSE THE PROGRAM HAS BOTH COST SUCH LARGE SUMS OF MONEY, AND RAISED SUCH HOPES AMONG DEDICATED EUROPEANISTS, ITS FAILURE WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY HAVE A MAJOR AND WIDER IMPACT ON FUTURE EUROPEAN WEAPONS PROCUREMENT DECISIONS.

2. ITALIANS IN KEY MILITARY, MINISTERIAL AND POLITICAL POSITIONS HAVE MADE IT CLEAR THAT THE MRCA IS A SERIOUS PART OF GOI CALCULATIONS. INDICATIONS ARE THAT ITALY WILL TRY
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(THOUGH NOT LIKELY SUCCEED) TO KEEP ITS COMMITMENT TO BUY 100

OF THE AIRCRAFT. THE ITALIAN AIR FORCE IS CURRENTLY SHEPHERDING A WHITE PAPER (SIMILAR TO THE RECENTLY APPROVED NAVAL CONSTRUCTION PROPOSAL) THROUGH THE POLITICAL BUREAUCRACY CALLING FOR A TEN YEAR PROCUREMENT BUDGET ON THE ORDER OF \$2 BILLION. IF APPROVED, THE LION'S SHARE OF THESE FUNDS CAN BE EXPECTED TO BE SPENT ON THE MRCA. GENERALLY, THE ITALIANS HAVE NO ILLUSIONS ABOUT THE MRCA, THOUGH SOME APPEAR CONVINCED THAT THE ULTIMATE COST WILL NOT BE MUCH ABOVE THAT OF THE F-16. THE MILITARY LEADERSHIP CERTAINLY RECOGNIZES IT IS NOT THE EQUAL OF THE F-16, BUT THEY, TOO, ARE READY TO ACCEPT SECOND BEST IN THE NAME OF EUROPE AND IN THE NAME OF AN INDEPENDENT LOGISTIC CAPABILITY. SHOULD THE MRCA FAIL, THE IMPACT HERE WOULD BE PRIMARILY IN TERMS OF SOME DEMORALIZATION OF A LARGE BODY OF DEDICATED EUROPEANISTS; THE ECONOMIC REPERCUSSIONS WOULD BE SEVERE IN THE SMALL AEROSPACE INDUSTRY BUT NOT VERY SIGNIFICANT IN NATIONAL TERMS.

3. WE BELIEVE THAT THE U.S. CAN PROVIDE VALUABLE PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT TO THE MRCA. WITH BONN WE QUESTION WHETHER AN IMPROVED CLIMATE FOR U.S. SYSTEMS (AWACS, F-15, F-16) WOULD RESULT FROM OUR SUPPORT OF THE MRCA. OVER THE LONG TERM, IMPORTANT U.S. TECHNOLOGICAL AND COMMERCIAL INTERESTS ARE UNDOUBTEDLY ENGAGED IN THE ENTIRE ISSUE OF STANDARDIZATION. ANY CONSIDERATION OF SUPPORT FOR MRCA SHOULD WEIGH THOSE INTERESTS. WE AGREE WITH BONN THAT A LESS FORMAL APPROACH THAN THAT SUGGESTED BY LONDON MIGHT BE MORE CREDIBLE. THE FORM OF THAT APPROACH COULD INDEED BE IN TERMS OF ORAL ASSURANCES BY THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE TO HIS EUROPEAN COUNTERPARTS OF OUR READINESS TO ASSIST THE CONSORTIUM IN PROVIDING THOSE FACILITIES (AS SUGGESTED BY LONDON) THAT COULD EASE THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MRCA. VOLPE

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